

## The Fate of Those Removed From HASAG-Pelcery

The first groups of those made redundant from HASAG-Pelcery were transferred to the newly-established Częstochowianka and Warta factories. Those, who were removed in December 1944, on the other hand, were sent away to concentration camps in Germany - the men to Buchenwald and the women to Ravensbrück.

The women's transport took three weeks, in sealed cattle wagons, with fifty people to each wagon. The train dragged itself along various stations, and continuously remained standing on sidings, because of the constant military transports. For the duration of the transport, there was no possibility of washing oneself or changing a shirt. Everyone became filthy and got lice.

Tired and spent, half dead, the *Częstochower* women arrived in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. The first procedure was "delousing" - baths and disinfection. Their clothes and all their things were taken, and they were given plain rags to wear. During the first period, the *Częstochower* women were quartered in simple field tents.

The camp made the impression of being a "Kingdom of Hell" and was filled with countless barracks, containing 45,000 women of almost all European nationalities, who had been dragged there. The management of the camp was in the hands of SS women - degenerates and sadists, who always ran about with long whips and beat, murderously, anyone they happened to come upon.

The rollcalls, which took long hours, started at four in the morning - but the women were already driven out into the frost, to the parade ground, at three o'clock. After the rollcall, the women were taken, as a group, to the work. Each group had a group leader and was guarded by an SS woman. The only purpose of the work was to torment them, because nothing positive was done. The work consisted of moving sand from one part to another with shovels, and trundling wheelbarrows of sand, coal and vegetables. On the way to work, at work itself and on the way back to the camp, the SS women beat them murderously, and many women perished every day because of the physical and emotional pain.

Food was doled out twice daily. This was a 15 *deka* [150g] portion of bread with black coffee and a portion of watery soup.

The *Częstochower* women were later transferred from the tents to block 29, from which Roma women had been evacuated. The block was filthy, infested with lice, bedbugs, fleas and other insects, so that the hygienic conditions were very bad. There was no warm water in the bathing facilities, and women would wash themselves with cold water in the great frosts, after which they caught cold and died of utter exhaustion.

Every early morning, numerous dead women lay [scattered] along the way from the barracks to the parade ground. The block orderlies would douse the women, who were still fighting with death, with cold water and carbolic acid to make them die faster, so as not to cause epidemics. The bodies of the victims were burnt in the crematorium. At first, the eternally

smoking crematorium chimneys cast terror into everyone. Gradually, the tormented women became indifferent to life - viewing the crematorium as the last stage, which would set them free from the pain and suffering.

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1945, a transport of 500 young women was sent off from Ravensbrück to Burgau<sup>1</sup>, among whom were women from Częstochowa, who wished to get away from the hell of Ravensbrück. The crowding in the railway wagons was terrible - seventy-five women in each wagon. The train dragged along for three weeks. To receive a chunk of bread, to eat every few days, was a rare occurrence. On the way, many women perished from starvation, cold and fatigue.

After three weeks of hunger and pain, the transport arrived in Burgau. During that same period, a group of 500 Jewish women from Bergen-Belsen also arrived. The camp consisted solely of these 1,000 Jewish women. All of them were half-dead and unfit for work. No work was carried out in this camp, so no food was given out either, and the hunger was unbearable.

Four weeks later, in April 1945, the women were transferred, yet again, to Türkheim<sup>2</sup>. This time, the journey was short and only lasted two days. Türkheim was a large women's camp, similar to Ravensbrück. Here, various types of work were already carried out. There were Jewish women from different countries there, mainly from Poland and Hungary. Here, too, the mortality rate was very high.

The political and strategical situation changed from day to day. Every day, transports of evacuees, from an entire array of liquidated camps, arrived because different territories had already been conquered by the Allied Forces.

At the end of April, the camp was evacuated - a march to Allach<sup>3</sup> began. The spectre of death loomed over everyone. Tired, utterly spent and starving, they all marched for four days and four nights. The entire road was littered with dead and half-dead women, who could no longer move and endure the last painful stage until the liberation. Only a small number dragged themselves to the new hell-camp in Allach. Here, the misfortunes already did not last long. A few days later, on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1945, the Americans occupied Allach, liberating the camp.

The half-dead, starved women began to eat everything they were given, which harmed almost all of them. The majority fell ill with gastritis and dysentery and, many of them, with blood dysentery. All these maladies caused many deaths.

The American Liberation Army sent the sick to hospitals and sanatoriums. A small number of the Częstochower women survived, and they are currently living in the [DP] camps in the vicinity of Munich - Feldafing, Landsberg, Föhrenwald, [Neu] Freimann and other camps.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: The Burgau concentration camp was a satellite camp of the Dachau concentration camp in Burgau of the same name, a town in the district of Günzburg in Bavaria.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: A satellite camp of the Kaufering system of camps, which was also part of the Dachau camps.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Allach concentration camp was a forced labour camp established by the SS in Allach-Untermenzing, a suburb of Munich.]